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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

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Community development efforts may involve working for voluntary organizations as well as engaging existing voluntary organizations in new activities. Voluntary organizations provide the community development worker with means of communication, legitimation, and resources. Working with voluntary organizations involves certain problems related to participation patterns, and certain limitations, inherent in the nature of voluntary organizations. When community development work is closely tied to "social action" objectives, voluntary organizations have special strengths for sponsoring such programs, but the community development worker may find very divergent role demands placed upon him.

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

Voluntary associations have been a prominent feature and influence in the American community since the founding of the nation. Alexis de Toqueville observed in 1831 that "Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations" and that "Wherever at the head of some new undertaking you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association" (de Toqueville, 1946:106). In contemporary society voluntary associations still form an important organizational element of our communities (Jonassen, 1974; Scott, 1957).

We define a voluntary association as a formally organized, secondary group, usually nonprofit in nature, with an expressly stated program of activities which an individual joins by choice. Voluntary associations are characterized by qualifying criteria for membership, such as being a resident of the community or nomination by existing members. Offices are filled through some established procedure of selecting officers, and the members of a voluntary organization hold periodic scheduled meetings (Scott, 1975; Smith and Freedman, 1972). There are very many different types of associations, and they have been classified in numerous ways. For our purposes, the most useful distinction is between "expressive" and "instrumental" associations (Smith and Freedman, 1972; Smith and Reddy, 1973; Warner, 1973). In expressive associations, the activities of the group are ends in themselves performed for the enjoyment, fellowship, and sociability of the members. In instrumental associations the activities are the means to a valued goal. The goals of instrumental organizations

may be to provide a service, such as influencing the decisions and activities of a government agency, or an internally focused self-help function, such as control of drinking problems. Many groups, of course, may incorporate both instrumental and expressive activities within the framework of the organization (Jonassen, 1974; Smith and Freedman, 1972; Smith and Reddy, 1974). However, the community development worker will almost always deal with the instrumental aspect of a voluntary association. Instrumental groups engaged in direct action, community problem-solving and/or decision making, are the base of support among voluntary associations in the community development process (Koneya, 1978; Warner, 1973).

The Professional Role

Most voluntary organizations have relatively narrowly defined goals and there is, of course, nothing to be gained by considering such activities as community development, even when the community is the beneficiary of the activity. A special case of voluntary organization involvement in community development, however, is found where a voluntary organization takes on broad goals of pursuing community change and develops the mechanisms for implementing such a program. To understand the role of the community development worker within this context, it becomes crucial to know the access of the voluntary organization to the local centers of power and community decision making.

In situations of ready access to power centers, the community development worker operates very much like a government-employed community worker, which is a role discussed in other sections of this book. Under conditions of ready access to community power, the main role difference between a government employed community worker and the community development worker working for a voluntary organization is to be found in the area of value neutrality; while working for a voluntary organization, the community development worker will be able to legitimately inject the objectives and strategy

preferences of the voluntary organization in the decision making process.

However, most of the voluntary organizations that are actively managing community development projects appear to be most appropriately classified as "social action" organizations (Rothman, 1974). According to Rothman (1974:24), "... the social action approach presupposes a disadvantaged segment of the population that needs to be organized . . . in order to make adequate demands on the larger community for increased resources or treatment more in accordance with social justice or democracy. It aims at making basic changes in major institutions or community practices. Social action as employed here seeks redistribution of power, resources, or decision making in the community . . ."

Because of the nature of the social action model of community development, it is almost always sponsored by voluntary organizations. While governmental units have undertaken attempts to engage in social action, neither local nor federal government has shown much enthusiasm for continued efforts at redistributing power and community decision making power. However, the nongovernmental nature of community action sponsors should not be equated with amateurism or even the absence of^a certain amount of bureaucratization, such as may be found in nationally based minority organizations, or certain programs associated with larger organizations, such as labor unions and churches.

Community development efforts which are controlled by voluntary organizations, especially when operating in the social action mold require an additional role of the community development worker, namely the advocacy role. While significant change at the community level is an important objective of social action, the immediate goal is to enhance the position of the group(s) one represents. Conflict and confrontation strategies become

'tools' to be used. This generally implies that the community development worker operates from a specific vision about how the larger community operates, and how it should operate. While this normative stance may be arrived at through the interaction of the community development worker with specific subgroups of the community, within the community at large the community development worker does not function as a neutral facilitator, but as an advocate for a particular segment of the community.

However, no social action strategy can succeed without the widespread participation and mobilization of the people it is to benefit. In many ways this represents the better known consensus-based community development approach: help a community (in this case, a subcommunity) define its goals, set priorities, strengthen leadership, and organize its resources. Thus, while community development efforts with a social action emphasis will frequently have a highly visible larger-community directed component, there will also be an "inwarddirected" sub-community component. In this latter role, the community development worker, like most community development workers, will find himself frequently in a position of working with the voluntary organizations in the community.

From the broader perspective of the community development professional, voluntary associations are a resource, providing both local leadership and community service experience (Child, 1974; Robertson, 1974). Furthermore, voluntary organizations are such a fundamental aspect of the community that it is difficult to perceive how a successful community program could operate without them. At the same time, working with voluntary associations poses certain problems or constraints. Some of these deal with the organizational nature of voluntary organizations, the limitations inherent to most volunteer work.

But before we deal with those, we need to pay attention to the clientele of the community developer who works with voluntary organizations in the community. This issue can best be addressed through looking at participation in voluntary organizations.

The Clientele Found in Voluntary Associations

Public involvement in voluntary associations is not equal across all segments of the American population, thus presenting the community developer with the fundamental challenge of broadening the base of participation in organizations engaged in development goals.

Estimates of the proportion of Americans who belong to at least one voluntary association vary as widely as from 50 to 85 percent in different studies (Axelrod, 1956; Babchuck and Booth, 1969; Scott, 1957; Wright and Hyman, 1958). Further, active participation in voluntary associations is substantially less than membership affiliation. Both in terms of membership and internal control, the functioning of voluntary associations is concentrated among relatively few individuals, leaving large segments of American communities under-represented.

Several characteristics determine the likelihood of a person being involved in voluntary organizations. Socioeconomic status is one of the most important determinants of participation in voluntary organizations. Persons of high socioeconomic status are more likely to be members of associations and of a greater number of organizations than lower-status individuals (Curtis and Zurcher, 1971; Reddy and Smith, 1973; Scott, 1957). The government-sponsored poverty intervention programs which mandated recruitment of volunteers from the ranks of the poor to participate in self-help, change-oriented organizations have illustrated clearly the difficulty of

involving certain population strata in organized community activities (Curtis and Zurcher, 1971; van Es, 1976). Findings, furthermore, show class-based patterns by types of voluntary association membership, with upper status individuals being more attracted to service and change-oriented instrumental organizations, while lower status individuals show a preference for immediately self-gratifying, religious and recreational, expressive organizations (Curtis and Zurcher, 1971; Reddy and Smith, 1973).

Voluntary association participation also differs by sex (Booth, 1972; Reddy and Smith, 1973; Scott, 1957). A larger proportion of men than women are members of voluntary associations, and men, on the average, are members of more associations than women. Women and men show distinct differences in patterns or types of voluntary association membership. Women are more likely to join religious and recreational organizations, while men more frequently join fraternal and job-related or political organizations (Booth, 1972; Scott, 1957). When engaged in instrumentally oriented voluntary action women are more likely to participate in health and welfare forms while men are more likely to participate in political and economic forms of voluntary action (Reddy and Smith, 1973). Generally speaking, membership in instrumental groups is more characteristic of men's than women's participation in voluntary associations (Booth, 1972). Sex roles and discrimination in the marketplace seem, generally, to account for women's lower participation (Stuart and van Es, 1978).

While minority status itself may not relate to different rates of participation, participation rates among many minorities are influenced by their low socioeconomic status (Reddy and Smith, 1973). Moreover, many minority members have traditionally participated in their own organizations and are not adequately represented in the voluntary organizations of the dominant community (Yep and Riggs, 1978).

A complex of factors including age, marital status, and number and ages of children, is taken into consideration when examining the effects of life cycle stage on voluntary association participation. The general pattern shows that people are increasingly likely to join associations from young adulthood through late middle age, at which point membership rates decrease with increasing old age (Reddy and Smith, 1973; Scott, 1957; Wright and Hyman, 1958).

A number of other factors, such as religion, rural or urban residence, and occupation, have some effect on participation, although these effects are usually overshadowed by the factors we discussed earlier.

In summary, while voluntary organizations are an essential element of a community's organization, working with voluntary associations has the potential for restricting community involvement to particular sectors of the population. Consistent monitoring of the nature of the voluntary organizations involved in community development programs is needed, and special efforts will frequently be needed to include in the community development program those segments of the community which are not adequately represented by voluntary organizations.

The Organizational Setting of Voluntary Associations

The community development worker's interest in voluntary organizations is based in part on the contribution voluntary associations can make to community development programs (Child, 1974; Robertson, 1974). These contributions can be classified into three areas: communication, legitimation, and resources. Voluntary organizations provide organizational structure for large numbers of community members. Because of the organizational structures, voluntary organizations, thus, provide an excellent means of disseminating information as well as for receiving information feedback. Through their

leadership structure, voluntary organizations also provide important ways of legitimizing community development programs and the work of the community development professional. Gaining the support of voluntary organization leaders will usually help in gaining the acceptance of the organization's members.

Finally, the membership of voluntary associations is usually recognized as an already organized, and therefore easily mobilized, resource. We are all well aware of the participation of voluntary organizations in fund raising, mailing campaigns, beautification projects, and infinite other possibilities. The strengths of voluntary organizations in this area lie in their ability to combine many relatively small individual contributions at low cost and with little overhead into a significant aggregate effort (Warner, 1973).

When working with voluntary organizations one becomes, of course, acutely aware of the fact that voluntary organizations contain elements which make it difficult to capitalize on their potential contributions to the development process. All the elements represented in the definition of voluntary organizations harbor potential liabilities. The voluntary nature of membership participation reduces the ability to mobilize the membership. Participation is contingent upon the benefits perceived by the members (Warner and Heffernan, 1967). Frequently the community development worker has little control over "benefits," which tend to be internal to the organization. However, providing a pleasant work environment and providing ample recognition to the organization, and, whenever possible, to the participating members, are important actions to be taken. One must strive to develop commitment to the community development program among the members of participating organizations, in addition to their commitment to the voluntary organization which mobilized them as members.

By their very nature, voluntary organizations tend to attract members who share certain goals and objectives. Frequently, such organizations are not geared toward cooperation and may consider themselves in competition or conflict with one another. Bringing such organizations into a situation where they must cooperate and share rewards has often proven extremely difficult. Especially when a voluntary organization is the prime sponsor of a community development activity, the need to properly manage relationships with other voluntary organizations becomes quite important for long term performance.

Functions of the Community Development Professional

Community development involves the mobilization of community actors in economic and civic affairs by working with already existing, or sometimes by organizing new voluntary associations. Creation of a new self-image among community residents, which encourages participation and the cultivation of skills in organizational activity is a crucial step in the development process (Jonassen, 1974; Littrell, N.D.; McCluskey, 1970), as is the need to coordinate the activities of different voluntary organizations (Mulford, et al., 1979). The role of the community development professional, thus, is to help organizations in identifying and adopting community development goals, to improve the effectiveness of voluntary associations in achieving their development goals, to broaden the base of participation, and improve coordination and cooperation between different voluntary organizations. In the case of social action based activities, the community development worker will need to manage conflict vis a vis the larger community while engaging in consensus building and resource mobilization in the subcommunity.

The combination of these two social action roles is a very difficult one. While preparation and experience are important factors, it cannot be denied that personal proclivities play a strong part in determining which role a particular community development worker plays best. Well known are the flamboyant, sometimes charismatic leaders who perform well in the spotlight of confrontation on the community stage. Lesser known are those whose strength lies in their ability to organize and build infrastructure into a particular community or population group. When a program demands that both functions are performed, it will be wise not to assume that both roles can be easily combined in one person's duties.

The issues of local involvement, cooperation, and conflict in community development are, of course, not limited to work with voluntary organizations. These issues are present here as well as elsewhere in the community. The potential contribution of voluntary organizations in terms of promoting involvement, legitimizing community development goals, and mobilizing resources, however, makes it attractive to try to overcome the obstacles that are encountered.

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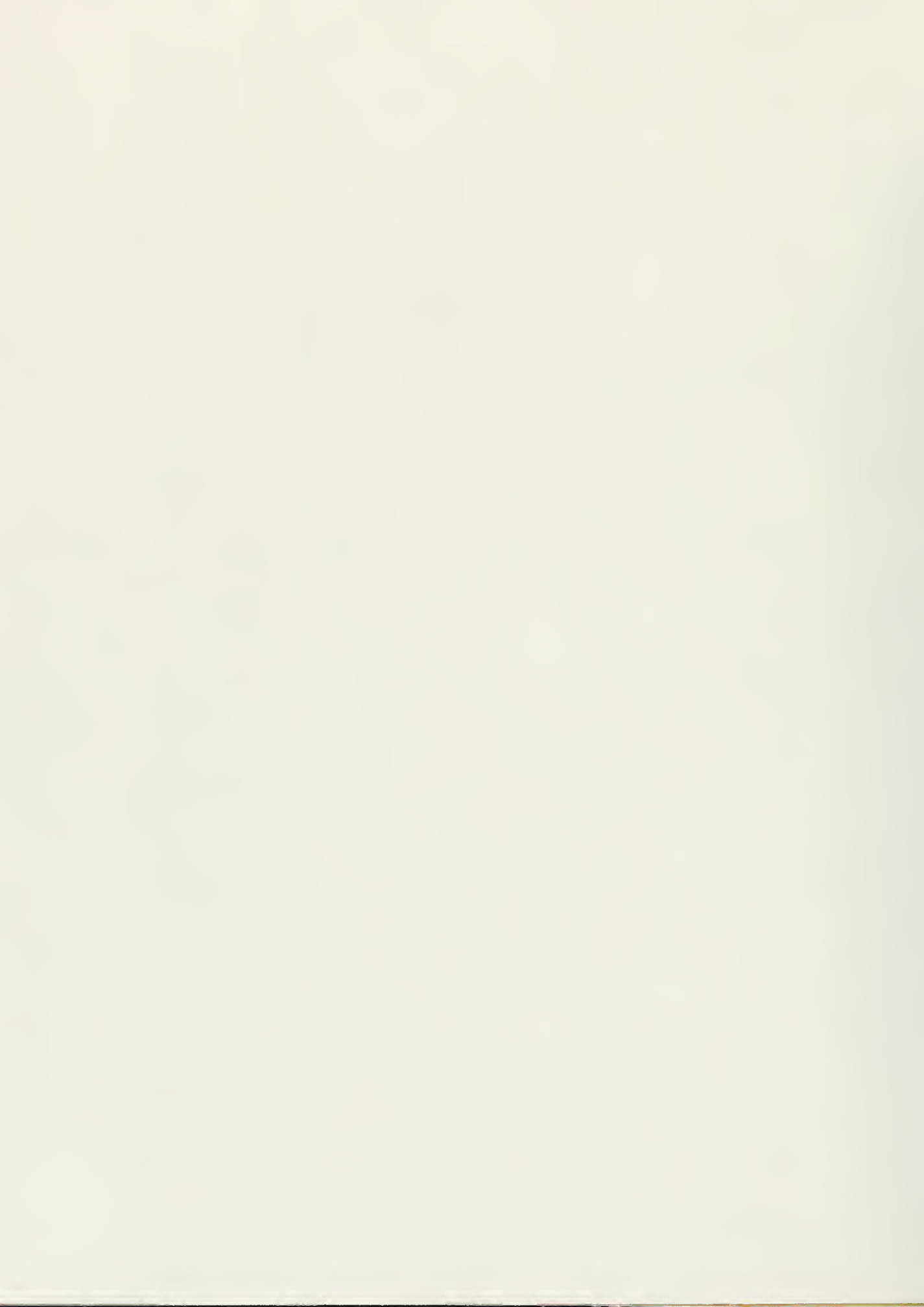
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